

Message Text

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TAGS: ELAB, PFOR, ECON, VE

SUBJECT: IRON MINERS RETURN TO WORK

REF: CARACAS 897

1. FOLLOWING A FORCEFUL SPEECH TO THE NATION BY PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, CARRIED ON RADIO AND TELEVISION THE EVENING OF JANUARY 23, THE IRON MINERS EMPLOYED BY THE NATIONALIZED ORINOCAS MINING AND IRON MINES COMPANIES RETURNED TO WORK ON JANUARY 24, THUS ENDING A FOUR-DAY WILDCAT STRIKE. IN HIS SPEECH PEREZ REVIEWED THE VARIOUS STEPS HIS ADMINISTRATION HAS TAKEN TO SAFEGUARD THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKERS AND ASSURED THEM THAT THEIR SEVERANCE PAY IS GUARANTEED DOWN TO THE LAST CENT. PEREZ EMPHASIZED THE DUTY HE FELT TO DISCUSS THE WORKERS' DEMANDS AND OFFERED THEM AN ADDITIONAL TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO COMPLY WITH THE JANUARY 21 PRESIDENTIAL DECREE ORDERING THEM BACK TO WORK. PEREZ STATED UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT IF THE WORKERS REFUSED TO END THE STRIKE HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO THE NATION WOULD REQUIRE HIM TO CLOSE THE IRON MINES AND "REORGANIZE" THE WORK FORCE.

2. WORKER RESISTANCE TO ENDING THE STRIKE HAD BEEN BROKEN DOWN DURING JANUARY 23 BY THE VISIT OF A FLOOD OF GOV AND CONFEDERATION
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OF VENEZUELAN WORKERS (CTV) OFFICIALS EXPLAINING THE TERMS OF THE

NATIONALIZATION AND ASSURING THE WORKERS OF THE GOOD FAITH OF THE GOV AND THE CORPORACION VENEZOLANA DE GUAYANA (CVG). SOME MOVEMENT TO RETURN TO WORK WAS REPORTED EVEN PRIOR TO THE PEREZ SPEECH.

3. FOLLOWING THIS SPEECH ONE GROUP OF RANK-AND-FILE WORKERS SENT A CABLE TO THE PRESIDENT PROTESTING THAT BEFORE HIS SPEECH THEY HAD BEEN UNAWARE OF MANY OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE IRON MINES. THEY CITED AS A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT WORKERS ARE TO RECEIVE TITLE TO HOUSING WHICH THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY

RENTED FROM THE COMPANIES. THE WORKERS STATED THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH HAD REMOVED THE CAUSES OF THE STRIKE, AND THAT THEY WOULD RETURN TO WORK, EXPRESSING SORROW FOR THE LOSSES CAUSED THE NATION BY THEIR ACTIONS.

4. COMMENT: PEREZ'S SPEECH WAS A MASTERFUL COMBINATION OF CONCILIATION AND THREAT WHICH SEEMED TO STRIKE JUST THE RIGHT NOTE WITH THE WORKERS AND THE PUBLIC. PEREZ SEEMS SUCCESSFULLY TO HAVE EXTRICATED HIMSELF FROM WHAT APPEARED TO BE A NO-WIN SITUATION FOR HIS ADMINISTRATION. FUTURE PEACE IN THE IRON MINES WILL DEPEND, HOWEVER, ON THE SUCCESS OF NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NEW CONTRACT. THESE ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN MARCH 25, 1975. FOR THE TIME BEING THE STRIKE SEEMS TO HAVE ACTED AS A CATHARSIS WHICH HAS ALLOWED THE WORKERS TO EXPRESS THEIR FEARS REGARDING THEIR STATUS AS STATE EMPLOYEES AND HAS FORCED THE GOVERNMENT TO FACE UP TO THE RESPONSIBILITIES IT HAS UNDERTAKEN TOWARDS ITS NEW EMPLOYEES. THE REAL LOSERS MAY HAVE BEEN THE ESTABLISHED LEADERSHIP OF THE MANY SMALL UNIONS ACTIVE IN THE IRON MINES AS WELL AS THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE CTV, WHICH SEEMED TO HAVE EVEN POORER COMMUNICATIONS AND CREDIBILITY WITH THE WORKERS THAN THE CVG OR THE GOV. THIS LESSON COULD HARDLY HAVE BEEN LOST ON PRESIDENT PEREZ.

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